

The President. Still?

Q. —and it's not only Prague. It's the whole country, going into Germany.

The President. So sad.

Q. So it's very bad. No chronicle—no person ever remembers such a disaster.

The President. It's a 500-year flood.

Q. A thousand.

The President. A thousand-year flood. Wow, that's too bad.

Q. But as we say, Charles did it—from the 14th century. [*Laughter*]

President's Visits to Europe

The President. Well, I'm glad the country is recovering. We're really looking forward to it and looking forward to our trips, too. They're going to be magnificent.

Q. We expect more people than for the Pope in 1999.

The President. Really? It's going to be exciting. I'm looking forward to it. I better make sure my speech is—I think they'll like it.

All right. We'll see you there. Thanks. Thanks for coming. I'm looking forward to going to St. Petersburg again.

Q. Yes, sure. Thank you very much.

The President. The second time in one year. Maybe a third time.

Q. Did you like it?

The President. Yes, it was spectacular. Remember, we went out on the boat, Vladimir, myself, Sergey Ivanov, floated a—White Nights. Fantastic. It won't be White Nights this time, though. Will be white days, right, snowing?

Q. Yes, snowing. [*Laughter*]

The President. We'll see you all there. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 10:45 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for later broadcast, and the transcript was embargoed for release by the Office of the Press Secretary until 6:30 p.m. In his remarks, the President referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; Prime Minister Siim Kallas of Estonia; President Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic; President Eduard Shevardnadze of the Republic of Georgia; Secretary General Lord Robertson of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Borisovich Ivanov. A tape was

not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty

November 18, 2002

Coalition Against Iraq

Q. Mr. President, this week NATO will be celebrating an historic expansion as well as focusing on transforming the Alliance to meet new threats, such as Iraq. You have spoken about the possibility of leading a coalition of the willing against Iraq. Why not speak about using NATO forces against Iraq, since under NATO's charter all members are supposed to come to the aid of any member under direct threat?

The President. Well, first of all, I hope we can do this peacefully. And by doing it peacefully, that means I hope Saddam Hussein disarms. Of course, we've hoped that for 11 years. We've hoped that for 16 resolutions. We now have a 17th resolution, and this time I intend to work with nations that love freedom and peace, make sure the resolution stands. And if he doesn't disarm, you're right, I'll lead a coalition of the willing to disarm him. And there's all kinds of ways for that coalition to be formed. It could be formed with NATO, if they choose. I have said to the U.N. Security Council, "We'll go back and discuss the matter with you." But Mr. Saddam Hussein must understand he'll be disarmed one way or the other. I hope it's done peacefully.

NATO and the War on Terror

Q. The new members of NATO are quite small. Do you see them as contributing something significant militarily to the Alliance?

The President. I was hoping you'd ask, do I see them contributing something to the Alliance, so I'm going to answer it that way. First, I'll answer it militarily, because I do believe they can contribute something really important, and that is, they can contribute their love for freedom. These are countries which have lived in totalitarian states. They haven't been free. And now they've seen freedom and they love freedom, just like

America loves freedom. And that's going to be a really important—it will add some vigor to the relationship in NATO that's healthy and wholesome.

And I think they will. The key is to—I think they will help militarily—but the key is to change the military strategy of NATO. Lord Robertson understands this. It starts with the understanding that Russia is not our enemy. NATO doesn't need to be constructed to prevent the Warsaw Pact from invading Europe. After all, the Warsaw Pact doesn't exist. As a matter of fact, the Warsaw Pact is becoming NATO, slowly but surely. We don't need that type of mentality, and we've got to have a military strategy that addresses the true threats.

The threats we face are global terrorist attacks. That's the threat. And the more you love freedom, the more likely it is you'll be attacked. And therefore, the Article 5 that you referred to for NATO becomes very relevant in this war against terror. The war against terror will not only be defeated—the terrorists will not only be defeated militarily, but the terrorists will be defeated as we share intelligence and as we cut off money and as we deny access and as we stiffen up border requirements in order to make sure that people can't go from one spot to another with plots and/or messages to attack.

And so it's a different kind of war. And it's going to be an interesting meeting, because not only is the meeting going to expand, but the meeting is going to address how best to achieve this common objective. I'm absolutely convinced that the so-called military gap between America and all countries can be addressed with a good strategy. And that will be interesting for observers to watch. I think it's going to happen. I know that Lord Robertson, who runs NATO, is committed to developing a relevant strategy and one that will work.

Chechnya/War on Terror

Q. Russian President Vladimir Putin has equated his war in Chechnya with the U.S. war on terrorism. Do you agree with that equation, or do you still feel, as was stated during your election campaign, that Russian

forces are committing brutalities against innocent Chechen civilians?

The President. I think that Russia should be able to—or hope that Russia should be able to solve their issue with Chechnya peacefully. That's not to say that Vladimir shouldn't do what it takes to protect his people from individual terrorist attacks. But this is a different kind of war that we face. This is a war where we're dealing with people who hide in caves and kind of shadowy corners of the world and send people to their suicidal deaths. It's a war that I believe can lend itself both to chasing those people down and, at the same time, solving issues in a peaceful way, with respect for the human rights of minorities within countries. I said that in the campaign. I also say it to Mr. Putin every time I see him.

NATO-Russia Partnership

Q. Do you envision Russia ever becoming a full-fledged member of NATO?

The President. I think the partnership between NATO and Russia is going to be a very constructive partnership. We'll see. Time will tell. The key thing is to make sure the relationship works the way it should, which really says to Russia that an expanded NATO on your border is not a threat to you or your future. As a matter of fact, it should enable you to grow peacefully.

I'm going from Prague to St. Petersburg precisely to deliver that message to the Russian people, that even though NATO will have been expanded on your border, particularly in sensitive areas like the Baltics, you should not fear expansion, you should welcome expansion, because you've now got a neighborhood that is much more peaceful for you to—in which to realize your vast potential. And that's important for Russia to hear.

Q. Russia now has a special counsel with NATO—

The President. Are we getting the hook already?

Q. Does that mean we're running out of time? Let me ask you another question—

The President. It's hard to see on radio.

Freedom and the War on Terror

Q. Central Asia—we broadcast to Central Asia. And many experts say that the authoritarian regimes in that region are actually fueling terrorism because their people feel helpless and unable to effect change. Do you think there are any dangers in the U.S. allying itself closely with those governments that are——

The President. I think anytime the United States allies itself with a government, that we never forget the basic premises of our existence, and that is: Freedom is important; the human condition for all are important; we value every life; everybody counts. And in my judgment, the more people relate to the United States and work with the United States, the more likely it is they will work to improve the human condition. And that's what we spend a lot of time doing. That's one of the great things about our country is that we embrace freedom, first and foremost.

It's one of my concerns about Iraq. Listen, we've got people living in Iraq that are tortured and brutalized in order to keep this man in power. I weep for those who suffer.

And so the great cause of the United States is freedom. I tell these countries—they talk about freedom—I say, “Freedom isn't America's gift to the world. It's God-given. Everybody counts.” And it is with—that spirit of recognizing the values of freedom I think will help improve people, no matter where. And you're right, there's some leaders there that need work with, and we're prepared to work with them.

But I will tell you, people—poverty is a tool for recruitment amongst these global terrorists. It's a way for them to recruit, perhaps. But poverty doesn't cause killers to exist. And it's an important distinction to make. These global terrorists are—some of them are rich, monetarily. They're obviously poor in spirit. They have no regard for human life. They claim they're religious, and they kill in the name of religion. And there are some breeding grounds, no question about it. And therefore, we hope that prosperity spreads out from central government to help people. But I hope people don't confuse the mentality of the terrorist leaders and economic plight, because these people are plenty comfortable. They just kill. And we're

going to get them before they get us. And that's what the world needs to know about the United States.

Usama bin Laden

Q. Usama bin Laden still seems to be alive. Are you——

The President. Could be.

Q. ——worried that he's plotting another major attack on the United States?

The President. Whether it's him or somebody else, they're plotting an attack, no question about it. That's why we've got to get them. But this issue is bigger than one person. If—the war on terror is a group of fanatics. They hate America because of what we stand for. They hate us because we love freedom. And that's why we're on the hunt. And slowly but surely, we're dismantling them.

I told the people of this country it's going to take a while. I said it's going to be patient—the farther we get away from September the 11th, 2001, the more people are going to tend to forget what took place in this country. And it's normal reaction for people to just kind of try to settle back and hope that something doesn't exist. But my job is to remind people of the threats we face, based upon facts, and to find these killers. And that's exactly what we're going to do. As I tell people in America, there's no cave dark enough to hide from the justice of America and our friends.

And my speech I'm going to give in Prague to the youngsters there, I'm going to remind them there is a coalition of the willing in place right now, chasing down terror. We've got 90 nations—90 different nations—all teamed up, doing everything we can to bring these people to justice. And we'll prevail. Make no mistake about it. We'll prevail.

Thank you, sir.

Q. Thank you, sir.

The President. Is there any doubt in your mind we'll prevail?

Q. Not anymore. [Laughter]

NOTE: The interview was recorded at 1:45 p.m. in the Library at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Secretary General Lord Robertson of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; President Vladimir Putin of Russia; and Usama bin

Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization. A portion of this interview could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks in a Meeting With Nobel Laureates

November 18, 2002

It's my honor to welcome this year's Nobel laureates to the Oval Office. Of course, I welcome somebody who spent a lot of quality time here. President Carter and Mrs. Carter, we're so honored to have you as well as the other distinguished Americans who are here with us.

These Americans are a great honor to their fields and a great honor to our country. And we're proud to have you here. We're proud for what you've done, for not only America but the world. And we're proud for your contributions.

And I want to thank the Ambassadors from Sweden and Norway for coming here as well. Mr. Ambassadors, thank you for being here. All Americans take great pride in the accomplishments of these good folks. We'll be watching the news clips of the ceremonies. We will be with you there in spirit.

And once again, we thank you and your families for your dedication to the greatest country on the face of the Earth. And may God bless your work, and may God bless your further endeavors. Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:17 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Ambassadors to the U.S. Jan Eliasson of Sweden and Knut Vollebaek of Norway.

Interview With Czech Television

November 18, 2002

NATO's Role in the 21st Century

Q. Mr. President, this week in Prague, NATO will invite seven countries to join the Alliance. But there are other topics on the agenda, and the future of NATO is one of them. What do you see NATO will be doing in the 21st century? What is its role?

The President. Well, I think—first of all, I'm excited about going to Prague, and I want

to thank the citizens of that important city and the great country for their hard work in recovering from the floods and preparing Prague for our arrival.

This is going to be a historic meeting because, as you said, we're expanding NATO. The most important alliance America has is NATO, and the expansion of NATO is something that I think is very important.

The role of NATO is different as we go into the 21st century. NATO used to be a way to defend Europe from the Warsaw Pact. But the Warsaw Pact no longer exists. Russia is not an enemy. And we face new threats, and the new threats are global terror. And so one way to make sure NATO is relevant is to focus on the true threats to freedom, address those threats, and figure out ways that we can work together to accomplish what we want, which is a peaceful world, which means better intelligence-sharing, the capacity to cut off money, and a military operation that reflects the nature of the wars we'll be fighting. And that's going to be one of the most important discussions we face there in Prague.

Cooperation in the War on Terror

Q. Well, there are really big gaps between the war-fighting capabilities of NATO—of the United States, on one hand, and the European countries, on the other hand. And Lord Robertson is saying that the Americans are not always willing to share the technology necessary for NATO. Are you ready to participate on organization of European forces?

The President. Well, I think what has to happen is there first be a strategy that recognizes that the Czech Republic can provide a certain contribution or the French or the British—not the French but the Germans or the British can provide certain kind of capabilities—and that we dovetail each capability to an overall strategy. In which case, of course, America is willing to work with our friends and allies to make sure the NATO Alliance works properly.

In other words, everybody can contribute something. But it all has got to be done within the strategy of the true threats we face in the 21st century, which is global terrorism. That's the biggest threat to freedom right now.